

The Friends of Lewes Society

Guiding Principles for the Design of Garden Rooms



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Introduction

Lewes is fortunate in having many fine buildings and areas that are distinguished by their differing periods and styles of architecture, landscaping and history. Most of the historic area has been designated as a Conservation Area and the most significant individual buildings have been “Listed” as buildings of special architectural and historic interest. Whilst other parts of the town have not been selected for special designation, they are attractive and well cared for. Many areas were carefully planned with individual buildings following a common architectural style.

The aim of the designation of Conservation Areas, the Listing of individual buildings, and planning controls in general is to protect what is good and attractive about the buildings and areas in the town. It is not to turn Lewes into an open air museum. Nor is it to prevent people upgrading and making sensible changes to their homes to meet their current needs. However, as Lewes is a principal town within the South Downs National Park it is essential that future development conserves and enhances the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.

Lewes has come under pressure in the last decade to find space for more accommodation – both residential and commercial. Its close proximity to two universities, its position as a public transport hub and its recently acquired status within the South Downs National Park, have all contributed to an increased demand for space in support of start up businesses, ancillary family units etc. And the demand has led to increased rental and capital costs which in turn has increased the pressure on available space.

Thus, planning applications for garden rooms, to be used as home offices and to provide additional accommodation for members of the extended family, has increased year on year. The natural features and spaciousness of gardens make an important contribution to the Lewes townscape as well as supporting climate change mitigation through surface water management and urban cooling. Thus a garden room can have a significant impact on local character, amenity and flood risk.

Current planning law is clear about what constitutes an ancillary garden room. ‘Garden Room’ applications cover high quality habitable buildings which will support the ancillary need for which they are intended. However, there is a concern that, in time, when the immediate need has gone, there could be a change of use to either a commercial or a separate rental ‘beds in sheds’ facility, with an initially unintended detrimental impact on neighbours and support infrastructure.

This guidance sets out the key principles which the Society encourages local planning authorities, property owners, developers and architects to follow, regarding the design of garden rooms.

Guiding design principles.

Generally, siting of a garden room at the front of, or side of, the principal building should not be considered unless a link can be shown with the existing character of the street. It should not unduly affect outlook from habitable rooms of neighbouring properties or principal garden areas. Generally, a bathroom/washroom facility will be acceptable, kitchen facilities will not.

Garden rooms should:

1. Have a functional link to, and accord with, required ancillary use in relation to the principal dwelling.
2. Be in the same ownership as the principal dwelling.
3. Protect and enhance the character of the neighbourhood.
4. Not have an adverse impact on the appearance of the street scene, where visible from the public highway and the wider surrounding topography.
5. Complement the existing building or groups of buildings, boundary walls or fences.
6. Be situated within the curtilage of the principal dwelling and at the rear of the principal dwelling.
7. Share the vehicular access to the principal dwelling.
8. Have no boundary demarcation or sub division of garden areas between the garden room and principal dwelling.
9. Not overshadow neighbouring properties or gardens.
10. Not significantly reduce the size of the garden.
11. Be one storey, other than in exceptional circumstances.

When reviewing planning applications for garden rooms the Friends of Lewes Planning Committee will:

1. Support a restriction on use being imposed on the application.
2. Support planning law interpretation of 'ancillary' and object to an application when this is not met.
3. Object to proposals to construct outbuildings in front of the principal dwelling.